

# Daily Devotional

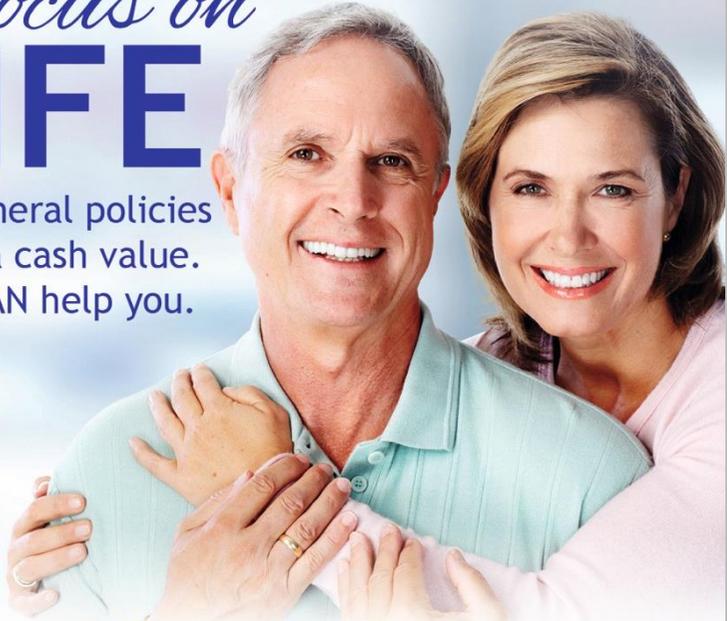
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## Booklet



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## WEEK 1

### Unity: DAY ONE

#### The power of unity

Our reading this week gives us a beautiful picture of the power of unity! The church was just being established and King Herod had arrested some of its members, their leader, Peter, was one of the prisoners. This was not the first time the people of the Way had experienced persecution, but this time they responded differently. Instead of allowing the persecution to cause fragmentation and division as it had in the past, the church gathered in unity to pray! *“So Peter was kept in Prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him...and the chains fell off Peters wrists”* Acts 12:5,7. When Gods people come together with one mind and purpose, united in Spirit for a common goal, miracles happen, chains fall off and prison doors fling open. We have seen the power of unity displayed all throughout scripture. We see it as the walls of Jericho come crashing down when the people of God lifted a unified shout of praise. We see it on Gideons Battlefield as his army of only 300 blow their rams horns, break their jars, and cry out in unity and miraculously the enemy army defeats itself! We see it in that upper room as the disciples meet to pray and the Holy Spirit of God descends on them in a Breath-taking way. Unity is powerful.

There is a wonderful statement that the Lord makes in Genesis at the tower of babel that emphasises the power of unity, *“Look!” he said. The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them!”* -Gen 6:11. These people were united for the wrong reasons and still, God acknowledges the power they had because of their unity! Imagine what would happen when we were unified for the right reasons?!

United, the church is a force that cannot be reconned with.

***Prayer: Lord God, when fear threatens to cause division, give me the courage to choose unity***

## WEEK 1

### Unity: DAY TWO

#### Unity is not uniformity

Unity is not uniformity. In fact, the greatest threat to unity is the expectation of uniformity. When we expect our brothers and sisters in Christ to worship the way we worship, be passionate about what we are passionate about and engage in the spiritual practices the way we do, we cause division because we draw a line in the sand of the right way and the wrong way. These lines keep the other out. These lines perpetuate judgment. These lines make people feel as if they do not belong and may eventually be the reason they walk away from the church. These lines place unhealthy expectations on other people who were themselves created individually in the image of God. When we expect people to fit into the boxes we have created, we lose a beautiful facet of the image of God that they carry. The opposite of unity is not difference. The opposite of Unity is division. Difference is inevitable and healthy. Paul gives as a beautiful picture of this healthy difference in his description of the body of Christ... *“And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? ... But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.... The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you.... there should be no division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for each other” -1 Cor 12.* Division is caused by judgement, an elevated sense of superiority, and a lack of curious interest in the other. Unity is built when we choose love, honour, empathy, and humility. As we journey with this complex issue, may we remember that, *“we will never look into the eyes of someone that God does not love. Always be kind” - Unknown*

**Prayer: Lord God, teach me how to celebrate difference**

## WEEK 1

### Unity: DAY THREE

#### Unity is important

We are living in times of great division. It is impossible to go onto the internet without being overwhelmed by the tension of our fractured culture. Social media has given us a platform to share our voice and instead of using this opportunity to unify, for the most part, we have used it to divide. We are constantly being compelled to choose a side, pick a perspective, and voice our opinion. Judging those who see things differently. You don't have to go further than the comments section of a popular post to see the brutal effects of our disunity, using the anonymity of the internet to tear each other down from being different to us. We are divided and our division is causing pain. As children of God, now more than ever, we must strive for unity because it is only in unity that our fractured culture will find healing.

Unity is important! Jesus emphasises its importance in the famous prayer he prays in John 17:22-23, *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one...so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

Our unity with each other is what will cause the world to notice Jesus. Our unity with each other is what will compel the world of His love! Our unity with each other is what will build His Kingdom. As Christ's Christians we have a responsibility to strive for unity. We have a responsibility to refuse to allow the difference in others to cause such offense in us that we withhold love from them! Paul urges us of this in Ephesians, *"Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."*

**Prayer: When I am faced with difference, help me choose unity through love instead of division through offense.**

## WEEK 1

### Unity: DAY FOUR

#### Unity with each other requires unity with God

It is our love for God, our belief in Jesus and the presence of the Spirit of God inside of us that unites us. Unity is not singing the same song in the same way; it is singing to the same One. Paul reminds us of this in Philippians, *“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit... then make my joy complete by being united in spirit and purpose...” Phil 2:1-2.* We were all saved by the same blood, we are all forgiven by the same cross and we all worship the same God in heaven who calls Himself our father! *“And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Cor 6:18.* The fact that we are brothers and sisters in Christ is what ultimately unifies us! But how will I relate to you as my brother or sister if I do not feel like a child of God? And how can I feel like a child if I have drifted from God’s side and in my waywardness began to feel like an orphan? We see this take place in the story of the prodigal son. After walking away from his father, he began to feel more like a servant than a son. The good news is that the moment he decided to go back home and be united to his father, his sonship was re-established! For unity to happen in the body of Christ I must first be personally unified with God, again. When I come close to God His Spirit testifies with my Spirit that I am a His child, *“the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship... The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” - Romans 8:15-16.* When I am united with Christ through the infilling of His Spirit, I am instantly united with the other because the moment I receive the Spirit’s testimony, is the moment I feel loved, accepted and commissioned into a family of believers. It changes the way I see myself and those around me.

***Prayer: Lord God, give me the courage to come back to you again.***

## WEEK 1

### Unity: DAY FIVE

#### Unity with each other requires personal unity

There is a wonderful story in the book of Ezekiel that gives us a picture of Gods church standing together as a unified army. When Ezekiel arrives at the scene all that is before him are scattered bones. God Asks the prophet to “prophesy to the bones”, and as he does this, Gods breath- Gods very spirit, enters them in a mighty way and a powerful portrait of unity is displayed as broken and fragmented parts of the body start to join together again. At the end of this account Ezekiel testifies, *“I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet- A vast army.”* Ezek 37:10

This story reminds me that we cannot stand as a united army until the individual soldiers are healed and whole. We cannot stand together if we cannot stand. There is a saying that goes, “hurting people, hurt people”. Often when people cause pain and division, they are simply giving us a glimpse of the pain they carry themselves. They do not do this out of evil or vindictiveness, but because it is not possible to look to the interests of each other when the internal pain we are experiencing is demanding all our attention. When there is brokenness inside of us it is very easy to neglect the other. It is not easy to bear with each other if we cannot bear with ourselves, it is not easy to be kind and gracious to others if we are unable to extend grace and kindness to ourselves and it is impossible to love each other if we are unable to love ourselves. Perhaps that is why, when Jesus gives us the commandment to love each other he adds, “as you have loved yourself”- Mat 22:39. If we want to make unity possible we must first do the work to take stock of our own hearts, to identify the parts of us that are fragmented and divided within us and to seek healing by inviting the divine healer into our brokenness

***Prayer: God our healer, come and breathe into the parts of us that are broken and fragmented***

## **WEEK 1**

### **Unity: DAY SIX**

#### **Sustaining unity**

God has already created unity through His life, death, and resurrection. We do not need re-create it; it is our job merely to sustain it. What I am learning is that sustaining unity is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this is why God sent His Spirit to fill all believers at the establishment of His church, because without an infilling, we cannot live the way he called us to live.

It is the Spirit of God that changes our character and enables us to extend grace, kindness and empathy. The fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control are all weapons that must be used in the fight to sustain unity! When this fruit grows inside of us, we are enabled to bear with each other in love, agree to disagree, learn from one another, and even celebrate our diversity. It is the Spirit of God that reminds us who we are in Christ. When our identity is firmly established as Gods child, our eyes are opened to see other people not as a threat, but as family! We move from a place of judgment and comparison born out of insecurity, to a place of love and camaraderie. We are enabled in an instant to honour and encourage instead of judge and complain. And, it is the Spirit of God that can heal every part of our fractured hearts so that we are enabled to love the world as Jesus commanded us to. As healed and whole people we are able to move our attention from ourselves onto those around us. As healed and whole people we are able to pray as boldly as Francis of Assisi did, *“Oh Master, grant that I may never seek, So much to be consoled as to console, To be understood as to understand, To be loved as to love with all my soul”*

***Prayer: Holy Spirit, come and fill us anew we pray***

## **WEEK 3**

### **Acts Church**

#### **Unity**

**Welcome:** Do you have a personal story that displays the power of unity?

**Worship:** Who you say I am

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcC1Bp13n\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcC1Bp13n_4)

**Word:** Read: *1 Corinthians 12:1-31, Acts 12:1-19, Eph 4:2-6*

#### **Questions:**

- Why do you think Christ has called us to unity?
- What do you think are some misconceptions about what unity entails?
- How do you think we can be different and united at the same time?
- What are some personal characteristics you can build to make unity possible?

**Work:** Take a moment to be alone with God and ask His equipping, healing Spirit to fill you again.

## **WEEK 2**

### **Community : DAY ONE**

#### ***Read Acts 2 : 42-47***

The early church took community seriously. It wasn't just an occasional event or gathering. It was regular and ongoing. They valued spending quality time together, and they did it often.

In the early church early church we see a focus on what matters—the Word of God, fellowship, worship, and prayer. We also see who matters—the body of Christ doing life together. It is clear that is wasn't just a once-a-week event. In our culture of focusing so much on individual desires, being “in community” can seem a bit strange to us. But it's all about relationships, and that is something we can grasp even in this “me first” world.

Relationships always involve sharing—time, experiences, material goods, and more—and sharing requires an ongoing personal investment. It endures through joys and struggles over the long haul. Doing life together is one of the strengths of Christian community. We are not called to be perfect but authentic in our relationships. The gift of community that we share always has room for others, even when it is messy.

In what way can you invest more in your relationship with God and others today?

#### **Prayer**

**Father, with you, we want to live fully together as your people, wherever you have placed us. Thank you for this gift. Amen.**

## **WEEK 2**

### **Community : DAY TWO**

#### ***Read Acts 42 :***

I was in conversation recently with a young woman who had just returned from a mission trip. When Zoe thinks about a recent mission trip she was on, she remembers meeting with the rest of her group each night to share stories about the day, some were about joyful times when they saw God at work in what they were doing, and others about struggles or hardships. Whatever the story was, the result was always the same - her group would share encouragement and build each other up, helping everyone to refocus their attention on God.

We all experience times of joy and times of struggle in our lives. Having a place to share about them is meaningful and can help us celebrate and support one another. An encouraging community is a place where all of our experiences can be shared and we can receive support and friendship no matter what is going on around us.

We all need people in our lives who encourage us, and we need to be encouragers to others. This is the essence of Christian community.

#### **Prayer**

**Father, help us to find encouragement from others and to be encouragers to people who need to hear kind words today. Amen.**

## **WEEK 2**

### **Community : DAY THREE**

#### ***Read Acts 42 :***

Consider the early church in Jerusalem. From about 120 believers at the time of Jesus' ascension (Acts 1), the church grew to more than 3,000 after Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. Then the church kept growing from that day on because of the preaching and teaching ministry of the apostles, the fellowship of believers, prayer, and the signs and wonders done by the Holy Spirit through the apostles ([Acts 2:42-43](#)). More and more people believed in Jesus because of the power of God displayed in the church.

Do we see the same eagerness today in people around us in our communities? Perhaps we should reflect on our own eagerness, and how we can engage with others around us, perhaps we should reflect on our own eagerness to continually grow our own faith journey and relationship with Jesus.

#### **Prayer**

**Lord, make us into powerful witnesses of your gospel of grace so that the world may know you! Help us to be encouraging and engaging members of our community. Amen.**

## **WEEK 2**

### **Community : DAY THREE**

#### ***Read Acts 42 :***

Somehow, many of us have been blinded into thinking that we can navigate Christianity on our own, and yet, when we look at the Bible we never see that! In the Book of Acts we see that the gospel changed their lives and it brought them together in life-on-life relationships, this was a natural overflow for them.

The isolation that we have all experienced on various levels due to the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how much we value the connection that community moments and how important personal relationships are in every day life.

A reflection point would be to ask yourself whether you are in life-on-life relationships that spur you on in your relationship with Christ, and challenge you apply the gospel to your life.

#### **Prayer**

**Father, help us to connect with people and strengthen our relationships. Help us to connect with those who are often out of our usual circles. Amen**

## **WEEK 2**

### **Community : DAY FOUR**

#### ***Read Acts 42 :***

Being in community means that we are required to notice people in our greater community. Is there someone here in our midst who struggles to buy clothes to wear or put food on the table? Is there a way that you can be reaching out to ease their burden.

Being in community also means that we share a commitment to prayer. Corporate prayer, and individual prayer. Praying for others, and praying for yourself. Praying for our church and praying for our community. Praying with words and praying in silence. Praying together here at church but also praying together at home.

The simplest and yet most powerful response of the Christian community to God's great work of salvation in Jesus Christ, is prayer – where we learn that we are loved by God, and are so filled by his love that we are tasked with sharing it with others.

#### **Prayer**

**Father, remind us to continuously hold ourselves and others accountable** in building our prayer lives.

## **WEEK 2**

### **Community : DAY FIVE**

#### ***Read Acts 42 :***

In the early church we see how important relationships and reaching out to others was. Our need to be in community speaks to one of our basic needs as human beings. We long be with one another – to share joys and sorrows together, to support and care for one another, to eat together and to be remembered.

Is there someone in your community that you have never really had a good conversation with? Perhaps you could reach out and go see them for coffee hour and get to know them! Is there someone that you know has been at church as long as you, but you just never learned their name? Perhaps you could include them in your community by simply being with a smile and quick introduction.

We must be devoted to fellowship with our community at large, not just the few friends. While it might feel uncomfortable, remember that you are doing something sacred, you are fulfilling the church's devotion to fellowship!

#### **Prayer**

**Father, give me the prompting to know who to reach out to, who to include and who to build relationships with.**

## **WEEK 2**

### **Community : DAY SIX**

#### ***Read Acts 42 :***

My challenge for us all is to choose 2 or 3 people in your community circle to reach out to, to notice, to pray for. Through our collective efforts we can extend God's grace, love and mercy to so many people.

And do you know what might happen? The Lord might just take these moment of faithful and ordinary witness and add to it: just as the early disciples saw the Lord add to their number day by day, so too might we see the growth of the Kingdom, the revival of the Church, the continued revival of this church.

#### **PRAYER**

**Lord, give me the courage to reach out to other, may I be an example to those around me witness to as many people as possible today.**

## **GROUP NOTES**

### **ACTS CHURCH - COMMUNITY**

#### **Welcome:**

Share an experience of being in community this week that made an impact on you.

#### **Worship:**

Listen to the song Corner Stone

#### **Word:**

##### **Read Acts 2 : 42-47**

- Reflect on what it means to you to be in community
- Discuss ways of encouraging others in your community
- 

#### **Work:**

Reach out to choose 2 or 3 people in your community to notice, to pray for.

## **GOD STEPS IN: DAY ONE**

### ***Read Acts 9:1-6***

I am terrible with directions; I often get lost and before Google Maps I used to phone for help. Whenever I phoned for help the person on the other line used to often give landmarks to help me along my way - signs to show me that I was heading in the right direction.

When we read the story of Saul and his conversion there are numerous 'landmarks' that show us something of the way God works. This week we will be exploring some of these 'landmarks' to show us the way that God works and includes us in that work.

The first landmark that we notice is that Jesus finds Saul. Saul was not looking for Jesus, he was trying to stop others from finding Jesus. On this road of trying to discredit the story of Jesus, Jesus then reaches out to Saul and encounters him. Jesus does the work and meets Saul where he is and Saul has a life changing. However, Jesus then reaches out to Saul and meets him where he is. Often God reaches out and meets us in places and even when we aren't looking for God.

The next thing that Jesus does is to explain to Saul that he will have work to do "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (verse 6), this shows that Saul will now be involved in the work that Jesus does. When God reaches out to us, although we are blessed, we become a blessing to others. God touches us so that we will be included in the work that God has in store for us. God's grace is not there for us to hold onto and keep to ourselves, it is there to flow into us and then through us to others.

***Prayer: Loving Father, thank you that reach out to us where we are. Thank you that you invite us to do Your work with us, may we have the courage to accept that invitation. In Jesus name, Amen.***

## LEARNING TO TRUST: DAY TWO

### ***Read Acts 9:7-9***

After Paul encounters Jesus and is struck blind there is a moment where he is led about by the hand for three days. Nothing in scripture is ever insignificant. Perhaps this moment was about learning to trust, learning to surrender, and becoming humble. As a Pharisee Paul would have been brought up believing that those who are blind are in some way less than the healthy or cursed by God. Paul was someone who had so much to boast about, yet after his encounter with Jesus everything changes. He realises that in his weakness God is strong, he realises that it is but by the grace of God that he is saved and through that grace of God is able to make a significant difference in the world. Paul was led on a journey of being someone who was able to boast through to someone who served wholeheartedly.

When we are invited to be part of the work that God has in store for us – and that is an invitation that is extended to ALL who have an encounter with Him, then the next step is to be humbled, to learn how to trust and to surrender. We need to learn to trust God because often in the work that God has for us we do not know or cannot see the outcome of what God has asked us to do. We usually don't know the outcome because if we did we would think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. To trust is to follow through with what God has asked us to do, even when we don't understand it. To surrender is learning to recognize God's voice and then do what God has called us to do. The only way we recognize God's voice is by spending time with God. The more time we spend with God the more we realize that God does the work through us and so it is not dependant on our strength, our ability, it is not dependent on us, but we are dependent on Him.

***Prayer: Jesus please lead us by the hand so that we can recognize your voice, learn to trust you and rely on you. Thank you for calling us into the work that you are doing, may we be faithful to you as we learn to follow you. In Jesus name, Amen.***

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE: DAY THREE

### ***Read Acts 9:10-19***

The next moment in the story of Saul's conversion is a beautiful moment. God calls out to Ananias and tells him to pray for Saul. Saul is known for breathing murderous threats against the followers of Jesus, and yet here God is asking Ananias to pray for him for healing. When Ananias prays for healing for Saul, Saul recovers his sight and is able to regain his strength.

This part of the story reminds me of a few truths. Firstly Ananias shows us what trust is about, he trusted God's instructions, even though it involved risk and didn't necessarily make sense. His trust wasn't a blind ignorant trust, but he knew God well enough to engage in a conversation with God. This is the kind of working relationship we need to try and cultivate with God.

The other part of the story is a reminder for me that we are never called to work alone. God's work is always community work. It always involves others. If it is only my work and what I do, then perhaps it is my work, for my benefit, and not the work of God. God's work, as we notice in this story, is always done with others. Saul was not alone, he needed Ananias to pray for him. Ananias was not alone, he needed Saul to start working with him in spreading the gospel. This story also reminds me that in the Body of Christ God helps us cross boundaries like the boundaries between Saul and Ananias. Without the intervention of Jesus Saul and Ananias would never have worked together or prayed for each other. This is the amazing part of the work of God is that often we will be called to work with people that we would never have dreamed of working with and in that moment we discover the work of the Holy Spirit.

***Prayer: Father help me to remember that the work I do with you is never on my own. Teach me to work with people across different walks of life. In Jesus name, amen.***

## YOU HAVE GIFTS: DAY FOUR

### ***Read Acts 9:20-22***

The story of Saul and his conversion hits a high point in these two verses. It shows how after Saul's encounter with Jesus, after he has learnt something of trust and vulnerability, and after he has journeyed with others, God uses him. God uses Saul to reach out to others. From being the one who was trying to stop the spread of the Jesus movement, Saul becomes the one who spreads it the most. From being the one who was trying to arrest those who were spreading the gospel, Saul becomes the one who proves the gospel.

Saul discovers what it is that God has called him to do and he goes out and does it. Sometimes we forget that when God calls us to do something God will equip us for the 'task' that God has called us to. Here Saul had no way of knowing that he would be able to spread the gospel in the way that he was, after this journey of encountering Jesus, learning to trust and spending time with others who serve God, Saul embarks on a journey of discovering God's call for his life. As Saul discovers God's call on his life, Saul becomes more and more equipped for that call.

There is a saying that has almost become cliché, but it is still true. That is that "God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called." This is true for the story of Saul and it is true for our story as well. When we encounter Jesus and allow that encounter to lead us to becoming involved in the work that God is doing. When we learn to trust, become vulnerable and are willing to learn from and lean on others, it is then that we will start discovering what it is that God has called us to do. As we discover this call on our lives for what God is asking us to do, it is then that we will start realising that we are equipped to do what God has called us to do. I wonder if you and I have taken seriously, the invitation to work with God, or have we fallen into the trap of thinking, "not me, I'm not called."

***Prayer: Father please show me Your call on my life, in Jesus name, amen.***

## WORKING FOR GOD ISN'T ALWAYS EASY: DAY FIVE

### ***Read Acts 9:23-25***

I find it ironic how the plot changes in these two verses. Suddenly Saul has moved from the hunter to the hunted. He has become one of those whom he wanted to stop, a spreader of the Jesus movement, and now his previous colleagues are out to do to him what he wanted to do to others. Saul wasn't above the struggles, he wasn't above the threats, just because he had a miraculous conversion, a deep call, and a transformation of heart and service, didn't mean that he wouldn't face hardships. Rather he had to face many hardships.

Sometimes as Christ followers we get involved in the work that God has for us, then it becomes difficult. We face challenges, persecution of some kind, conflict in the church, and our initial response is to wonder why this is happening when we serve God? Yet, when we explore the story of Saul, we notice that working for God isn't always going to be easy. In fact, like the story of Saul, there will be moments, situations or people who try everything to stop us from doing the work that God has called us to do.

The good news that we can hold onto from this part of the story is this; if it is difficult to do what God has called us to do, if we face hardships and trouble, it doesn't mean that we are outside of the will of God. We need to remember that working with God wasn't easy for Jesus, Paul or any other disciples, so won't always be easy for us. Yet, in the midst of the struggle, in the midst of the hardships, God is at work in us, with us and through us. The struggle is not the only part of the story.

***Prayer: Father please help us in those moments where serving you has challenges. Surround us with people who will support us and protect us. Teach us to have trust in you and to remain faithful to You and the work you are calling us to, even when times are tough. In Jesus name, Amen.***

## STRENGTH OF UNITY IN INVOLVEMENT: DAY SIX

### ***Read Acts 9:26-31***

The final part of our story for this week's devotion is the story of Saul arriving in Jerusalem. He tries to join the other followers of Jesus. The other disciples are obviously not very excited about him joining them based on his history and reputation. Only when Barnabas journeys with Saul and brings him to the others is there a place made available for Saul. Barnabas is ready to listen to Saul's story and then share it with others. That act of listening and sharing was crucial to Saul's involvement in the work that God had in store for him. Once again I am reminded that the work of God is never done in isolation but always in community. Once again I am reminded that involvement in the work of God is dependent on the unity of God's people.

When Saul was united with the People in Damascus he was able to preach fearlessly and escape persecution. When Saul was united with the people in Jerusalem he was able to preach fearlessly and managed to escape. There is a sense here that Saul's success in fulfilling what God had called him to do was not only dependent on Saul's trust of God, but also on Saul's unity with God's people.

This week we have journeyed through the story of Saul's conversion and transformation. We have learnt that God does the calling, the working and the equipping of each of us. We have learnt that we are blessed to be a blessing in the sense that God equips us and we have learnt that although working with God can be challenging, we are called to be part of God's community working together with God and each other to bring about the Good News of the Gospel.

***Prayer: Jesus, help us to trust in you, each other and the gifts you have given us as we serve you. In Jesus name. Amen.***

## GROUP NOTES

### ACTS CHURCH - INVOLVEMENT

#### Welcome:

Share your experience of when you first realised that Jesus was real.

#### Worship:

Listen to the song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fouqn5Xg5-E>

#### Word:

##### **Read Acts 9:19b -31**

- Do you believe God wants everyone to be involved in God's work?
- In what ways did Paul benefit from being involved in the work of God?
- In what ways did the church benefit because of Paul?
- What gifts did Paul have and what challenges did he face?
- In what ways are we like Paul?
- Where do you think God is calling you to get involved?
- In what ways will you benefit from this involvement?
- In what ways will the church benefit from this involvement?

#### Work:

Find one way this week to be involved in the work that God is doing.

## **Deepening Discipleship: DAY ONE**

***Read Acts 10:1-23***

Peter is summoned by a Roman officer, Cornelius (who is a well known man, who has a good heart, and is God fearing). Cornelius, the soldier sends three of his servants to go out and seek Peter. It is believed that it was quite a distance to travel back and forth, and there is a beautiful moment after Peter hears the reason why they are there for him, when he extends hospitality to be by offering them a place to stay the night.

I believe that the act of hospitality was taught by Jesus taught to His disciples, I think of when Jesus speaks about giving bread instead of stones and fish instead of a snake he taught the to be good hosts to others.

The journey of us deepening our discipleship or starting to invite others to be disciples so that we can continue the teachings of our loving Father begins with us being good hosts, and to offer good hospitality like Peter did to the 'strangers'. Sometimes we don't need to use words to show people that they are valued and cared for, sometimes we just need to use our actions to such love and to others and thereby being good hosts to all.

How am I being a good host to other people ?

***Prayer: Dear Lord, help me have a lifestyle that praises you and worships you.***

## **WEEK 1**

### **Deepening Discipleship: DAY TWO**

***Read Acts 10:24-33***

When we read John 13:35, Jesus states that people will know we are His disciples if we have love for one another.

Yesterday we looked into being good hosts for others and today we look into accepting others. Peter arrives at the place of Cornelius, and when he sees the community before him, Peter recalls what the angel had said to him.

Discipleship is about building community and all about welcoming everyone, of every nation. It doesn't matter what the person's background is, what their cultural background is or even what their race is. When we are in Christ, being the disciples of Christ, we are one. And thus we need to remember that Jesus Christ commissioned us to go make disciples of every nation, which is what Peter himself came across. He was reminded that he should not think of anyone as impure or unclean, gentile or Jew. We need to grow together for the sake of God and deepening relationships with both Him and others.

***Prayer: Dear Lord thank you for what you have done for us and what you are still doing right now, please continue to give us wisdom.***

## **WEEK 1**

### **Deepening Discipleship: DAY THREE**

***Read Acts 10:34-38***

Being devout and God fearing like Cornelius is a lessons we could take on board and take into our groups and families.

- Cornelius actively pursued God
- Cornelius revered God
- Cornelius always met other people's needs
- Cornelius prayed

Imagine how different the world as we know it would be if we were as devout as Cornelius and also obedient to him?

Imagine how different the world as we know it would be if our small groups were like Cornelius?

Our small groups, our discipleship groups need to pursue, admire and respect God, they need to meet other people's needs and they need to pray. This group's journey should be the deepening of their relationship with God.

We need to be willing and devoted like Cornelius the Roman soldier, he was so devoted that he invited others to come and hear about what good news that Peter had shared with him, and in a moment like this gentiles received the good news, and able to hear what God did for them and what He is still doing for them.

***Prayer: Dear Lord, teach me to listen for your voice and guidance***

## WEEK 1

### Deepening Discipleship DAY FOUR

*Read Acts 10:44-48*

The word is the main foundation for our journey as Disciples of Jesus as individuals and as such needs to be the foundation for our small groups/discipleships group as well.

When we gather we need to remember that Jesus is there with us, and what is beautiful to note with the early church is that when they gathered it was to hear what Peter had to say, and they encountered the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 18 : 20, unity, community and sharing together is emphasised in when we read “**where two or three come together in my name,** there am I with them.”

The disciples obedience led them to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and while it did not sit well with some of the Jews after hearing what happened, and what the word of God was saying they were very accepting towards the gentiles and surely when they observed that they realised that the deeper the relationships became.

The word is the light to our feet and our daily bread that we need to eat and share with other in order to grow in community.

***Prayer: Dear Lord, in difficult times, teach me to remember your will and teach me to understand it.***

## **WEEK 1**

### **Deepening Discipleship : DAY FIVE**

#### ***Read Acts 11***

What Peter and Cornelius did had an profound impact, to share the message with the gentiles was something huge and definitely part of God's plan.

Jesus demonstrated very clearly that the message and Himself were for the people - all people. God had promised that He would reach the nations and it all started with a group. You and I need to take up this challenged to, a challenge of deepening our discipleship journey, a challenge of being in community, especially during this season, a season of isolation and Covid-19. We need to accept the challenge of being brave like Cornelius and Peter ensuring that no matter what is happening around us we need to remain focused, praying and loving our neighbours as we love ourself.

Our small groups are there for support, they are there when we feel lonely, they are there when we are in need of something, they are there to hold us accountable and they are also there to journey with us as our discipleship becomes deep. Being obedient, devoted, prayerful and putting others first are key.

Discipleship becomes deeper when we acknowledge that all nations need to be included, it means that' learning from each other through love and in peace.

***Prayer: Dear Lord, help me experience your love and peace over the fear I have.***

**WEEK 1**  
**PRAY: DAY SIX**

Spend some time today in prayer and connecting with others who you have not connected with in a while, maybe send them a message or give them a phone call to check in on them.

Pray for the small groups of the Church.

Pray for the Church and the ongoing insurance claims.

Pray for the Christians who are left at home by themselves, unable to go anywhere during this pandemic.

Pray for our Church as we journey together as community.

Pray for all Christians in the world today.

***Prayer: Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.***

## **WEEK 1**

### **Deepening Discipleship**

**Welcome:** This week spend some time reading the Book of Acts chapters 10 and 11. Notice how Peter did not hesitate to share with the gentiles and how they experienced the Holy Spirit too, notice that this shows that God wanted all nations included.

**Worship:** Spend some time listening to “We are one in the Spirit”

**Word:** Read Acts 10 and 11, as well as Matthew 28:18-20

**Work:** Connect with friends, check up on them, connect with your groups if you haven't connected in a while. Pray for the small groups, cell groups and discipleship groups that are part of Northfield Methodist Church.

## **Day 1 – ACTS Church– Caring for the Vulnerable, The beggar**

**Reading:** Acts 3:1-5 MSG

“One day at three o’clock in the afternoon, Peter and John were on their way into the Temple for prayer meeting. At the same time there was a man crippled from birth being carried up. Every day he was set down at the Temple gate, the one named Beautiful, to beg from those going into the Temple. When he saw Peter and John about to enter the Temple, he asked for a handout. Peter, with John at his side, looked him straight in the eye and said, “Look here.” He looked up, expecting to get something from them.”

In society today the plight of the vulnerable is glaring. At every traffic light we are more often than not going to have an opportunity to engage with a “Beggar”....that is if in the hustle and busy of our daily lives, we even notice him or her? In our reading today I wonder how many times the Beggar at the Temple gate was ignored, spat one, verbally and physically abused? What made Peter and John choose to respond, rather than ridicule? What led them to care for the Vulnerable?

We need to take note that Peter and John were on their way to the Temple to pray, seeking to live life like their Savior Jesus Christ. This interaction with the Beggar provides more than just charity and justice, the primary response of society today. The key response to note here is that as Peter takes the man by his right hand and raises him up there was “Physical Healing” and a “Social Restoration” as the healed Beggar is now able to enter the temple with them!

**Question:** The beggar, the symbol of society's poor and marginalized, sat daily outside the temple. Who sits in constant need of healing and restoration in your community? How will you respond today and offer them meaningful help?

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit of God, lead me today to notice the vulnerable in the world, guide me to respond with love and care today. Amen

## **Day 2 – ACTS Church– Caring for the Vulnerable, The beautiful gate**

**Reading:** Acts 3:1-5 MSG

“One day at three o’clock in the afternoon, Peter and John were on their way into the Temple for prayer meeting. At the same time there was a man crippled from birth being carried up. Every day he was set down at the Temple gate, the one named Beautiful, to beg from those going into the Temple. When he saw Peter and John about to enter the Temple, he asked for a handout. Peter, with John at his side, looked him straight in the eye and said, “Look here.” He looked up, expecting to get something from them.”

When you have a conversation with the vulnerable in our world, you will begin to notice that life isn’t hard because of a lack of materialism, life is hard because of the barriers that are placed in your way.

It seems ironic that in our reading a Temple gate call “Beautiful” was the very thing that had the task of preventing those with the greatest needs and heaviest burdens from gaining access to that temple court of women, the general gathering place of public worship and the court of sacrifices. The Temple gate for the vulnerable stood as a barrier reminding the lame and blind that society considered them "less than" and not welcome inside sacred space.

So often Knowingly and unknowingly, society erects "keep-off-the-grass signs" around themselves and their sacred spaces. Sometimes we as the church are no different.

**Question:** To the beggar, the Beautiful Gate was an entry point for some and a barrier for others from the community of faith. What do you see today as a “beautiful” separating the vulnerable from the rest of society?

**Prayer:** God our Father, as I spend time with you in prayer today, will you help me see the barriers that I build that prevent me from responding to others. Amen

### **Day 3 – ACTS Church– Caring for the Vulnerable, Justice**

**Reading:** Acts 3:6-8 MSG

“Peter said, “I don’t have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” He grabbed him by the right hand and pulled him up. In an instant his feet and ankles became firm. He jumped to his feet and walked.”

What powerful words....”Get Up”!

These words of Peter to the vulnerable man is a Game Changer!

For a moment, think about the life lived by the lame man, from birth he had learned to live on the margins the areas of society offered to “lesser people” thirsty for Justice, longing to be seen. His life seemingly made up of moments pleading his case to others, hoping for the occasional positive response. I am wondering how many times he heard the words No! How many times was the spare change dropped on his mat in sympathy? How many times was he invisible?

But then the Game Changer....Peter and John look at him intently and he in return is asked to engage with them. This interaction is so different, it is hopeful, it offers an opportunity to turn the table of all the injustices experienced.

Friends, the good news of the Kingdom of God is that the encounter with the healing presence of God is available to all, sometimes we just need to “Look Up and Get Up”, a change in perspective.

**Question:** The Hebrew meaning of alms included justice. What "alms" of justice are you offering to others?

**Prayer:** O God of the prophets, you remind us to Love Mercy, to Act Justly and to Walk humbly with you God in this world as we care for the Vulnerable. Amen.

## **Day 4 – ACTS Church– Caring for the Vulnerable, Temple**

**Reading:** Acts 3:8-10 MSG

“The man went into the Temple with them, walking back and forth, dancing and praising God. Everybody there saw him walking around and praising God. They recognized him as the one who sat begging at the Temple’s Gate Beautiful and rubbed their eyes, astonished, scarcely believing what they were seeing.”

Have you experienced healing in your life? I don’t mean only physical, but include spiritual and relational healing?

What was the first thing you did on recognizing it? Did you rush to the “Temple” to be with God? Did you offer praise and adoration to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

In our reading today, we notice with such joy how the lame man responds! He goes into the Temple and walks back and forth, witnessing to the greatness of God.

But there is more to this than just walking back and forth! This is a sign of the new kingdom, a new era in which the “Vulnerable, poor, lame, the blind” are noticed, included. They too can now participate in God’s Blessings of the Kingdom. This newly healed man can now enter into the temple, restored physically but also socially and offer us a glimpse into the new reality of the Kingdom of God that is ushered in by the Resurrection of Jesus!

This Kingdom that is concerned and places high regard on the least and the lost!

**Question:** The temple carried dual meanings to first-century Hebrews: opulence, wealth and Divine presence. What does your church represent to the vulnerable in the community?

**Prayer:** Father God, *help me* be the church to the vulnerable in this world, loving, caring, embracing and faithful. Amen

## **Day 5 – ACTS Church– Caring for the Vulnerable, Blessing**

**Reading:** Acts 3:11

“The man threw his arms around Peter and John, ecstatic. All the people ran up to where they were at Solomon’s Porch to see it for themselves.”

Can you imagine the commotion as the man jumps up and throws his arms around Peter and John! He must have been laughing, crying and shouting out in absolute Joy at this miracle that has just taken place.

Can you imagine Peter and John’s response? Not wanting the crowds to rush over and give them all the credit, but also wanting the credit to be given to the one who was really behind the healing!

Friends, it is important to notice how quickly Peter refutes the idea that it was somehow by his power that the vulnerable man was healed. Peter wants it to be clear, this was Jesus....it was all Jesus.....Jesus healed this man.

So often the blessing is far greater than we can imagine, sometimes we take the credit for ourselves or offer it to other elements within our lives, but seldom acknowledge God as the one who is with us, who wants the best for us.

**Question:** The beggar thought he knew the extent of what he could ask for but was surprised to receive more. Do we limit God's ability to bless us?

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit of God. Help us never to limit God's ability to bless us!  
Amen.

## **Day 6 – ACTS Church– Caring for the Vulnerable, beyond the walls**

**Reading:** Acts: 19-23

“Now it’s time to change your ways! Turn to face God so he can wipe away your sins, pour out showers of blessing to refresh you, and send you the Messiah he prepared for you, namely, Jesus. For the time being he must remain out of sight in heaven until everything is restored to order again just the way God, through the preaching of his holy prophets of old, said it would be. Moses, for instance, said, ‘Your God will raise up for you a prophet just like me from your family. Listen to every word he speaks to you. Every last living soul who refuses to listen to that prophet will be wiped out from the people.’”

As we reflect on the Acts 3 reading, how should you and I respond to the vulnerable? How does the church respond to the Vulnerable? Perhaps we need to ask some difficult questions about our own view of the Vulnerable in our neighborhood?

Do we need to change our ways and lower the walls we have built. Do we need to engage with the greater church about how we care for the vulnerable and begin to look outwardly rather than remaining inwardly focused.

May our journey as people who seek to live Christ-like lives, lead us to opportunities, to love mercy, act justly and humbly serve all people, regardless of race, language, gender, orientation, religion. May we respond always in love and in care to those who reach out to us longing to be seen.

**Question:** The healing of the lame man signaled a new era in which God's love was extended beyond Israel to the least and the lost. How can you join your church to extend God's love beyond the walls of your congregation?

**Prayer:** Father God, thank you for outstretched hand to all people. You are a God who leaves the ninety-nine to care for the one. Amen.

## **ACTS Church– Caring for the Vulnerable**

### Group Notes

#### Welcome:

Share a time when you chose to respond to the needs of the Vulnerable in your community.

#### Worship:

Chris Tomlin – God of this City

[Chris Tomlin - God Of This City \(Lyrics And Chords\) - YouTube](#)

#### Prayer:

Points to include in you prayer:

- The good news of the kingdom of God is the distribution of God's healing and salvation to all.
- The gospel invites us to "Get up!" and walk in the power of the resurrection, no longer chained to the condemned spaces offered to us by others.
- Who do you need to look at intently?
- What new spaces for restoration do you need Got to show you

#### Word:

Acts 3

Micah 6:8

#### Questions:

Reflect on the six questions offered to you each day of this weeks devotional.

Work: Spend this week considering how you as a group can respond the Vulnerable by offering care, justice, mercy and love.





## HOW TO KEEP IN TOUCH

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 @NorthfieldVoice

 Service Times

Chapel: 7am & 5:30pm

Sanctuary: 8am, 10am & 6pm

Wesley Hall: 6pm (Youth)

Children's Church: 8am, 10am & 6pm



A group of people gathers regularly to take turns answering a single question.

In 18th century English, Wesley asked, “How does your soul prosper?”

or “How is it with your soul?” Today we might say,

“How’s your spiritual life?”

Take the message from the Sunday sermon into deeper learning by joining

or forming a small group. If you do not belong to a group yet,

you are welcome to sign up by contacting

Nick (082 808 1452) or Ria (063 020 4639).





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